

Workplace Bullying: Not a Manager's Right?

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Abstract

Previous research on workplace bullying has narrowed its subjective boundaries by drawing heavily from psychological and social-psychological perspectives. However, workplace bullying can also be understood as an endemic feature of capitalist employment relationship. Labor process theory with its core characteristics of power, control, and exploitation of labor can effectively open and allow further exploration of workplace bullying issues. This article aims to make a contribution by examining workplace bullying from the historical and political contexts of society to conceptualize it as a control tool to sustain the capitalist exploitative regime with empirical support from an ethnographic case study within the health care sector.

Keywords

workplace bullying, labor process theory, management control, ethnography

Introduction

Workplace bullying has become established as a significant research topic internationally. The United States, however, still lags behind the rest of the world in the identification and investigation of this phenomenon (Vega & Comer, 2005). All studies with a few exceptions have examined workplace bullying and its outcome within a psychological and social psychological framework. Some (Beale & Hoel, 2010; Hoel & Beale, 2006; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2014; Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2010; Ironside & Seifert, 2003; Lewis & Rayner, 2003; McIntyre, 2005; Roscigno, Hodson, & Lopez, 2009; Sjøtveit, 1992, 1994) have attempted to explore the concept of workplace bullying in the context of industrial relations and human resource management.

Workplace bullying constitutes repeated and persistent negative actions aimed at one or more individuals, which results in the creation of a hostile working environment. “Bullying involves a desire to hurt + hurtful action + power imbalance + (typically) repetitive aggressor and a sense of being oppressed by the victim” (Rigby, 2002, p. 6). Workplace bullying can be defined as repeated hurtful negative act or acts (physical, verbal, or psychological intimidation) that involve criticism and humiliation to cause fear, distress, or harm to the individual (i.e., victim). Research on workplace bullying to a large extent has concentrated on bullying techniques (i.e., work related, psychological, emotional, and physical), the organizational impacts of workplace bullying (human capital effectiveness, legal costs, increased health

care costs, and increased need for training; Von Bergen, Zavaletta, & Soper, 2006), and the individual impact of workplace bullying (i.e., worker safety, job satisfaction, humiliation, fear, job loss, group cohesiveness, and reduced performance; Parkins, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2006). There has also been research on how to reduce workplace bullying, impact of technology, and cyber bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

The variation in workplace bullying because of cross-cultural tendencies has also been considered. Hofstede's cultural norms (power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, femininity vs. masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long- or short-term orientation) have been correlated with the need to bully, fear of employee to express disagreement, and the overall decision-making process (Vega & Comer, 2005). Societies ranking high in power distance and low in uncertainty avoidance will be more prone to workplace bullying. Workplace bullying might therefore be more rampant in the Asian societies as compared with the European countries, Canada, and United States. For instance, Malaysia ranks high in power distance and low in uncertainty avoidance and reports high levels of workplace bullying at the corporate level (Kwan, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2014).

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There has also been an attempt (however little) to understand workplace bullying under the industrial relations lens. Both are related to degree of workplace conflict and how it could be resolved (Beale, 2010; Pollert, 2005, 2007). Attitudes of government, employers and workers, government policies, power of trade unions, organization change, and restructuring have been investigated in the context of workplace bullying to broaden the reasons behind this extreme employer behavior. If workplace bullying is explored from a macro-level perspective, that is, institutional, sectorial, national, and international arena, more insights with regard to this behavioral tendency could be gained. It might be possible to investigate specific issues that give rise to the contested labor relations (conflict and bullying). “Workplace issues that are actually contested and are the focus of the perpetrators’ attacks on victims” have not so far been a prominent topic of study. Workplace bullying if seen from the “eyes of labor process theory” can be “conceived as an endemic feature of the capitalist employment relationship” (Beale & Hoel, 2011, p. 7). According to Beale and Hoel (2011), there are different ways in which labor process debates could explain, clarify, and develop the workplace bullying literature. However, their arguments and observations lack the strong support of empirical evidence. This article aims to contribute toward the literature of workplace bullying by empirically understanding this extreme behavioral action of bullying from a labor process conceptual framework.

The article has been divided into four sections. The “Literature on Workplace Bullying” section will focus on the literature on the determinants of workplace bullying focusing on the individual and dyadic characteristics of the bullies and victims. The “The Labor Process Perspective of Workplace Bullying” section will then discuss workplace bullying from an explicit labor process focus thereby bringing its overall effectiveness in further threshing out this exploitative management strategy. The “The Difficult Boss: A Case Study” section cites reasons for the chosen methodology and analyzes empirical data. The “Discussion and Conclusion” includes suggestions for further research agendas.

Literature on Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying has been recognized as a harmful feature of modern workplaces with long-term damaging effects for both the bullied individuals as well as the organizations (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2005). It happens to be a deliberate, ongoing, and subtle activity with all its negative implications carefully masked, that is, “severe and pervasive problem” (Carbo, 2009, p. 97). In fact, workplace bullying can be characterized as an invisible, “intensively, individualized and harmful experience” (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2004 as cited in Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006, p. 119). Workplace bullying involves repeated acts, in which one or more individuals

engage in, with the intent to harm others and create a hostile working environment (Archer, 1999; Hutchinson et al., 2005, 2006; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). In work-related bullying, individuals are given heavy workloads, their applications for leaves are refused, and they are allocated menial tasks (S. Fox & Stallworth, 2006). Bullying behaviors include shifting opinions, overruling the victim’s decision, professionally attacking the victim, and openly flaunting one’s status and power (Yildirim, 2009). It takes the form of excessive monitoring, unfair criticism, judging work wrongly, and blocking someone’s promotion (Randle, Stevenson, & Grayling, 2007). It also involves behavior like ignoring the victim, not returning phone calls, memos, and emails. Workplace bullying leads not only to psychological harm but also to health-related issues (Hutchinson et al., 2005), financial loss, increased staff turnover, lowered morale, reduced productivity, and loyalty (Quine, 1999; Rayner & Cooper, 1997). In fact, workplace bullying could be a “more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together” (Einarsen, 1999, p. 16).

However, despite these long-term disastrous effects, there are hardly any federal laws within United States, with the exception of the proposed Healthy Workplace Bill (Yamada, 2004), which protects the victims’ right to work in a safe and collegial office environment (Carbo, 2009; Maurer, 2013). Moreover so, the proposed Healthy Workplace Bill singularly falls short of providing adequate remedial relief to the targets of bullying (Carbo, 2009). American legal system has been primarily focused on remedying the evils of slavery system. All federal laws are focused on remedying past forms of discrimination, that is, equal employment opportunities, disability acts, and equal pay acts among a few. There is no law that protects human dignity at work (Lueders, 2008). In contrast, the European systems are based on workers’ dignity, protection of personal and human rights (Lueders, 2008).

Thus, unlike sexual harassment and other forms of workplace incivilities, workplace bullying is not prohibited, neither is the bully ostracized by the higher level management (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009). The bully has the legitimate authority and responsibility to allocate work, assess work, and provide feedback to the victim. And she or he misuses this authority without facing any disciplinary procedures by the management. All symptoms like anxiety, depression, and stress experienced by the victim are viewed by the senior management as personality characteristics—victim’s inability to cope and lack of efficiency (Baillien et al., 2009). While the bully’s hurtful behavior is interpreted as having an authoritative personality, a domineering character which can be a little abrasive and aggressive at times (Baillien et al., 2009; Cortina, 2008). If someone reported bullying, she or he was seen as a neurotic and hypersensitive person by the management. “. . . can be repackaged by management as being an illusion of the worker: it’s all in the mind” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 60).

Bullying in the workplace is covertly accepted by the management and directed toward a person who is unable to defend himself or herself because of his or her lower rank and position in the organization. “Managers and supervisors identified as participating in bullying behavior were reportedly rewarded with promotions . . . biggest bully gets the best promotion every time and bullies are protected and moved into higher better paying positions for their inappropriate behavior” (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2014, p. 16).

The bullies are being protected by the people that have the power to do something about it. It is difficult enough to prove bullying in the workplace, without the added resistance of corrupt people in positions of power failing to do anything about complaints . . . (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2014, p. 16)

In fact, management policies feel it is “okay to bully, harass and threaten . . . [all management policies] assist management in covering bullying [and] managers join if it suits their agenda” (Cortina, 2008; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2014, p. 17).

Workplace bullying, thus, is the result of unequal power. Workplace bullying could be described as a political tactic “exercised for the achievement of personal or organizational goals” (Hutchinson et al., 2010, p. 29). A form of political tactic where by one could influence, win, or gain an advantage over the lower placed employee. A form of authorized power that involved the use of petty tyrant behavior. Bullying is a “rational form of behavior selectively employed by managers to influence behaviors and performance” (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007 as cited in Hutchinson et al., 2010, p. 29; Cortina, 2008).

In other words, it can be argued that workplace bullying arises due to the contested nature of conflicts endemic to the labor process, and can be conceptualized as “both a feature and an outcome of a hotly contested political process associated with the labor process” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 60). Therefore, to understand why bullying is accepted and conveniently ignored by the management policies with no legal remedying policies, it is essential to review this entire bullying process under the critical lens of labor process theory. The labor process framework would provide a clear picture and explanation of this degrading process. It is just not enough looking at workplace bullying from a psychological and social psychological context. To protect and safeguard the rights of employees, there is need to go beyond the mere interpretation that bullying is a form of escalated interpersonal conflict and differences in personalities (Hutchinson et al., 2010). A broader critical perspective would allow the more unobtrusive and less obvious forms of power to surface from behind the veils. Otherwise, this entire act of bullying in workplace will end up getting legitimized by the top management leading to suppression of the rights of the workers within a company (“. . . bullying legitimized as a strategy to influence and control

employees when seeking the achievement of organizational goals”; Hutchinson et al., 2010, p. 29). The next section discusses the labor process theory and its effectiveness in deconstructing the entire process of workplace bullying.

The Labor Process Perspective of Workplace Bullying

The entire concept of labor process theory is based on the ideology of paid employment, the relationship between employer and worker, which also includes management, unions, government, and state (Beale & Hoel, 2011; McIntyre, 2005). Labor process theory argued that management exploited and controlled labor to generate more profits.

The major structure of the labor process theory is built on the contributions of Marx (1970) and Braverman (1974). Marx explained the concept of a capitalist economic system and its possible effects on a work organization. But it was Braverman who eventually applied Marxist theory to the new methods and occupation developed by the capitalist system. Marx’s theory explained the capitalist economic system of production on the basis of class divisions. The whole society was divided into labor and capital. As explained in the factory system, labor no longer owned the instruments of production and was forced to sell their labor power as their only means of livelihood. The capitalist, unlike the worker, was in possession of capital, which enabled him or her to acquire the instruments of production and raw materials. The capitalist employed labor to transform raw materials into finished products that could be sold to earn a surplus. The capitalist main objective was to earn surplus or profits. To increase his or her profits, the capitalist exploited the labor power to its maximum potential. Under scientific management, labor power was reduced to a commodity. Scientific management resulted in a clear separation between execution and conception of labor process (F. Taylor, 1974). The functions of conception, coordination, and control were now performed by the management in a capitalist economy (Braverman, 1974). This resulted in clear separation of the tasks of conception and execution, rendering the worker and his or her labor power a mere commodity. It reduced the work of labor into simple, monotonous tasks. Capitalist production relations alienated “individuals from the products of their labor, their humanity, other people and ultimately themselves” (Crowley, 2014, p. 417). To quote Milkman (1997), “You [the employee] are a machine, an object, a piece of equipment. If it breaks, they will replace it. They don’t care about the individual” (p. 46). It is true that scientific management increased production capacity and efficiency but simultaneously, and perhaps to a larger extent, it was more focused on increasing management’s control over labor, so as to remove any form of resistance and accumulate profits. This system “was simply a means for management to achieve control of the actual mode of performance of every labor activity

from the simplest to the most complicated” (Braverman, 1974, p. 90). Effective management meant complete control. Management without control was inconceivable (Leffingwell, 1925). There emerged a clear connection between the control practiced by management and the capitalist framework of the society.

Management was a “labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation and conducted moreover as a labor process of production although it produces no product other than the operation and coordination of the corporation” (Braverman, 1974, p. 267). Management was concerned with creating structures of relationships and power to implement strategies that ensure the effective subordination of labor to the demands of capital (Zeitlin, 1974). Management, in other words, was shaped and influenced by the capitalist structures primarily concerned with the development, application, and maintenance of social and technical frameworks to preserve the interests of capitalist owners. This directly focuses attention on the contested nature of management (Edwards, 1979) in recognizing the relationship between the logic of capital accumulation and the implementation of various forms of managerial strategies of work and control. Control techniques and measures that were able to minimize labor resistance were discussed at length by other labor process theorists (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedmann, 1977). Control techniques over time became more indirect, hegemonic, and insidious to allow and encourage learning and innovation among the employees (Akella, 2003).

According to Friedmann (1977), there are two types of control: direct control and responsible autonomy. Direct control was based on the concept that workers are similar to machines and can be treated like machines. It therefore ignored the subjectivity of the workers. Responsible autonomy sought the support of the workers by incorporating their needs, abilities, and choices through participative programs like quality circles and job participation. Direct control and responsible autonomy bear close resemblance to McGregor’s (1960) Theory X and Theory Y. In contrast to Theory X, Theory Y believed that the productivity of workers could be increased by giving them more work autonomy and control.

A. Fox (1976) further discussed patterns of low discretion syndrome involving low trust and high discretion syndrome involving high trust. The former meant repetitive prescribed routines, close supervision, harsh discipline, careful checks on performance at short intervals, and punitive responses to mistakes. The latter involves presumptions of commitment to the responses to factors and coordination by mutual adjustment (A. Fox, 1976).

Both types of control measures, direct and indirect, created “totalizing work environments,” where coercion undermined norms of justice and civility, and employee abuse, humiliation and dehumanization, was permitted by the management (Crowley, 2014). Only in direct control systems, the exploitation was visible, while in indirect, hegemonic, insidious

control systems, it was cleverly masked to secure employee compliance and cooperation (Akella, 2003).

Within this broad perspective, workplace bullying can be conceptualized as a managerial control technique that is direct and autocratic in nature. It is a harsh discipline, repetitive in nature, involving close monitoring and supervision from the managers. If used properly, it can produce very effective results in the short-term period without incurring any extra costs. The effect of being “victimized can create in targets a need to protect their self-image by working harder and longer and by strengthening their self-respect through any means available to them” (Vega & Comer, 2005, p. 106). Managers might therefore consider bullying to be a rational act aimed at controlling employee in the short-term period. Simply because “management’s prime objective is ‘efficiency’ which managers alone are presumed to be able to define” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 63).

However, if workplace bullying escalates, it could lead to an unmanageable or stressful situation, or become a health-related issue for the victim. Bullying aids control but it also “sows weaknesses for the high commitment human resource management project” (Beale & Hoel, 2011, p. 11). However, it cannot be denied that it is an effective management tool to manipulate the employee, and increase his or her productivity and levels of motivation. “A degree of bullying might be expected to fit more ‘comfortably’ alongside more traditional autocratic styles of management” (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 2009 as cited in Beale & Hoel, 2011, p. 11). “After all better management (efficiency) is about making so-called ‘lazy’ workers work harder” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 64). Workplace bullying therefore could be conceptualized as another form and style of management control adopted by individual managers to enable maximum extraction of surplus from the labor (McIntyre, 2005).

Thus, under the lens of labor process theory, visualizing it from the angle of conflict of interest existing in the employment relationship and managerial control mechanisms, more clarity might be gained on questions pertaining to why, how, to what extent, and in what circumstances management and employers might gain from workplace bullying and what measures can be taken to protect employees. The next section explains the type of methodology adopted and supports all the above theoretical assertions with empirical data.

The Difficult Boss: A Case Study

Qualitative research deals with issues that involve theory development, “substantive theory,” which “has as its referent specific, everyday real world situations . . .” (Merriam, 1998, p. 17), where each individual’s point of view is important, and all voices and stories are heard loudly. Workplace bullying as a topic needs a qualitative approach. As succinctly argued by Creswell (2003), “when a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach” (p. 22). Workplace

bullying as a research topic is underexplored and therefore needs a deeper understanding. Issues pertaining to workplace bullying demand “[a] move away from large surveys to qualitative work involving interviews and case studies. Such methodologies can gather information of a richer kind from which we can build theories and then test them” (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002, p. 186).

Ethnography is a branch of qualitative research with a focus on “written description that focuses on selected aspects of how people lead their routine (or remarkable) lives in their environment and the beliefs and customs that comprise their common sense about that world” (Muecke, 1994, p. 189). Ethnography involves “going native”—dwelling deep into the participants’ world, their viewpoints, their ideologies and perspectives. The aim of this article is to examine workplace bullying under a labor process lens to justify its legitimacy so far in the corporate world, portray its harmful side-effects, and then strongly advocate for remedial measures to restore workplace dignity. This research study is investigating the painful and degrading process of workplace bullying and its aftermath. To be able to strongly condemn this workplace occurrence, there is a need to deconstruct all the happenings and events with a “critical eye,” allowing the readers to empathize with the victim’s pain and stress. Feelings like anger, rage, humiliation, disgust, and fear can only be relieved by the victim himself or herself, and only they can effectively portray them. A self-ethnographic narrative would allow the victim to recapitulate these feelings in a story form. It would enable him or her to decide what to exclude or include, and which incident was of more relevance from a pain and hurt viewpoint. Methods that are able to capture self-ethnographic narrations would include diaries, memoirs, journal entries, letters, and similar sources of a personal nature (Saramtakos, 1993).

Furthermore, single-case studies are eminently suitable where the case represents a critical test of existing theory or where the case is a rare, unique test of existing theory or serves a revelatory purpose (Yin, 1989). A single-case study would be more personal, allowing more illumination and comprehensive insights on the bullying incidents from a labor process track. It is therefore more advantageous to focus on one single-case study or rather on one victim’s pain, humiliation, and stress. This would allow the reader to effectively deconstruct workplace bullying and classify it as an atrocious and degrading process.

The author decided to adopt a critical perspective and analyze the data critically. Critical research presents the view of powerless people “marginalized or oppressed but challenge traditional authority structures” (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 6). Critical theory is required to deconstruct social conditions, expose various power structures, and investigate all issues within the structural, historical, and cultural frameworks of society. Also, finally, critical theory should concentrate on achievement of praxis because “without sustained commitment to praxis, critical theory restricts itself to becoming

a self-indulgent academic effort and thus risks losing its emancipatory potential” (Prasad & Caproni, 1997, p. 3, cited in Johnson & Duberley, 2000). But if the researcher is not seeking to be directly emancipatory while working within a critical perspective, the researcher could just “attempt to stand back from their work and interrogate their findings with a critical eye” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 21).

The author reasons that even though workplace bullying could be an effective control weapon, its consequences in terms of mental and physical outcomes for the victim cannot be ignored. Therefore, she decided on moral grounds to conceptualize the process of bullying in the voice of the victim, that is, the powerless party instead of the manager. This might allow more openness, more humaneness, and deconstruct the fear, torment, and helplessness involved in this psychological control measure. The author also made a decision not to adopt the stance of a neutral and detached researcher. Instead to allow justification to the victim, be more political in this research study. She decided to go beyond the detailed empirical account, interpret, and analyze the findings as a more highly involved individual.

Lived experiences, everyday life, the “real” world, are not simple unambiguous phenomena which can be easily caught and reproduced in the pages of books. Life does not lie around like leaves in autumn waiting to be swept up, ordered and put out into boxes. The drama of everyday life is richly textured, multifaceted and dense and we cannot hope to make sense of our world and more interpret it without a coherent theoretical understanding. (Westwood, 1984, p. 3)

This story about workplace bullying takes place in a small rural town in southern part of the United States. The town, has a population of 1,58,415, the per capita is US\$21,359, and the income of the bottom one fifth is US\$8,350. The town is one of the United States’ 10 most impoverished cities. There are 8.4% of the people earning below 50% of the poverty line, and 17% of the people are food stamp recipients (Zumbrum, 2009). The town is comprised of primarily African American population with other diverse groups consisting of Caucasians, Mexicans, Chinese, and Asian Indians. It is a city highly influenced by its southern traditions, heritage, and history. History that originated from slavery seeped in bonded labor and racial discrimination.

The story takes place against the background of a non-profit health care community organization, referred to as NET in this research study, affiliated with a large hospital catering to all the surrounding counties around the rural town. NET is an in-school interactive program delivered by a staff of nurse educators and support personnel. NET has around 33 full-time employees consisting of registered nurses (RNs), licensed practitioner nurses (LPNs), certified nurse assistants (CANs), and an office assistant. NET is a part of a large hospital entrusted with the responsibility of providing qualified nurses to all schools in the nearby counties. It is also responsible for educating the school children

and the surrounding communities on a variety of health-care-related issues like obesity, hand washing, teenage pregnancies, and teen parenting. Pseudo names will be used for the victim and the bully for confidentiality reasons.

Karen, who undergoes workplace bullying, had joined NET, after graduating from a local technical college with a business administration certification. She eventually wanted to return to school at a later date to obtain a bachelor's degree in business administration from a 4-year university. She was an easy, fun-loving, cooperative, and helpful person. On a personal level, Karen was happily married with a baby girl. However, Karen's personality and professional behavior underwent dramatic transformation within a short period of 3 months. It all started after Karen was given the responsibility of assisting Dianne on a project.

Dianne was an African American woman in her late 40s. She was the supervisor to all nurses working at NET. Dianne was a RN. She had an associate and bachelor's degree in nursing and had worked at the hospital as a nurse in all intensive care units. She had been with NET for the last 10 years. Dianne had around 15 years of experience as a supervisor at the hospital and at NET.

Karen was approached to reflect back on the sequence of events over the past 3 months, and record them. This narrative was handed over to the author for empirical analyses. The subsequent sub-sections analyze Karen's narrative. The author correlated the incidents with theoretical aspects of workplace bullying as a capitalist regime of control tool.

Excerpts From Karen's Narrative

According to labor process theorists, the entire society is divided into two sections. The managers are responsible for strategic planning and direction while the workers are responsible for execution and implementation of orders. This is similar to Karen's narrative.

It all started when my supervisor asked that I work on a specific project. I have always been a very hard worker that went far and beyond what I was suppose to do. I made sure that I was professional, on time and worked well with my team members. Sometimes I worked so well with team members, they would come to me for guidance. I always would tell my co-workers or new employees in our department that I am not the supervisor and they should go to her. These co-workers, or new employees, would always come back to me stating that the supervisor did not give enough information or instruction. It was noted on many occasions that I have always been good at this specific characteristic. Many times my co-workers would compliment me verbally about how smart I was; sometimes this was done right in front of her. I do not think that my supervisor had ever approved of this because she would come to me stating that "she" is the supervisor and that "she" is the one in charge of the department AND the employees.

Karen was responsible for day-to-day office work and functions while Dianne had all the supervising responsibilities.

When Karen's unawareness crossed into Dianne's territory, it led to confrontations. Karen was approached by the co-workers and team members to clarify Dianne's instructions. This clearly irked Dianne who confronted Karen with that "she [was] the supervisor and that she [was] in charge of the department and the employees."

After this, Dianne felt the need to assert her authority as a supervisor over Karen. She openly started controlling Karen's behavior and actions through various direct and indirect managerial techniques (i.e., bullying).

Labor process theorists argue that exploitation of labor is necessary to generate a profit. Conflict between labor and management is unavoidable. To overcome all employee resistance and to sustain profits, management lays emphasis on designing techniques and systems to control labor. Workplace bullying involves repeated unwelcomed negative act or acts (physical, verbal or psychological intimidation) consisting of criticism and humiliation with the intention to cause fear and distress to the target (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). It involves an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator. The bully possesses positional power that gives him authority to professionally attach the employee and flaunt his or her status and power. Workplace bullying could take the form of heavy or less workload (remove responsibility), refusal of leaves, delegation of menial tasks, and development of unrealistic goals and objectives (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Cortina, 2008). It also takes the form of inappropriate leadership, excessive monitoring, unfair criticism, and judging work wrongly. Workplace bullying could also be psychological in nature involving exclusion and isolation, ignoring the employee, gossip, and false accusation to undermine the employee (Herscovis, 2010). The victim might be yelled at, verbally harassed, belittled, intimidated, and openly humiliated (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Cortina, 2008). For instance, Crowley (2014) cites a study where the boss yelled at the paralegal (his junior) simply because he felt like yelling at someone—" . . . I just had to yell at someone and you were there . . ." (p. 429).

Karen had similar experiences at her office. She was rudely snapped at:

One day, I noticed that she was carrying some heavy supplies and I ran over to her and asked if she needed my help. She was carrying so much stuff; she could barely maintain her balance. I reached out to help her steady herself and when she peered from around the books and binders that she was carrying and saw it was me, she snapped, "NO THANK YOU! I GOT IT!" She was so sharp and short with me, I jumped back startled. She quickly walked away from me without the usual "Have a great day" or a good bye. I stood there frozen in my tracks still not quite sure of what had just happened . . .

There was a change in the usual superior concerned small talk and greetings.

. . . I always have been a very social person. I was easy to talk to and usually got along with everyone. I would also make sure to greet my supervisor when I would see her for the first time

during the day. Usually, she would stop in her tracks and ask me how everything was going or questioned if I needed any assistance from her. We usually would end the conversation with a cheerful “Have a great day” and she and I would be off in our separate directions. Well, I knew things had changed when I would do my usual greeting and she would be very short with her response

But Karen was still not bothered, she continued with her cheerful demeanor “I brushed off the confrontation as a moment of fatigue or exhaustion from my supervisor . . .” Karen in fact is condescending in her attitude when she forgives her for her rude behavior—“She was always working so hard and doing so many things at one time. I never really understood how why got anything done.” But she finally got the message when she was completely ignored the next day.

I looked her straight in the eye and said my usual good morning with a smile; only to realize that she had walked right passed me without even a single word.

The employee is now made to realize her inferiority. She is lower in power, status, and position in comparison with her supervisor. Dianne does not have to greet her or talk with her. Karen’s confidence slowly starts diminishing. From an over-confident employee who was ready to challenge her boss. Karen soon becomes a docile junior eager to please and pacify her boss. “. . . I decided that I needed to just stay out of the line-of-fire”

However, Dianne now started attacking her professional work. Earlier Karen’s proposals about creating new programs within the organization were always accepted and appreciated. But now her ideas were criticized as too simple and rudimentary. She is asked to come up with something better. She feels the need to reflect upon her work and herself more. As she writes, “. . . all through constant humiliations and letdown . . . I tried to follow her directions . . . needed improvement on” Karen is now forced to make an effort and produce the work that matches Dianne’s standards. Karen has transformed from an arrogant and confident employee who used to criticize and analyze the actions of her supervisor. To an employee who just wants to meet the expectations of her supervisor.

But this control is still not complete. Karen resists the control being exerted on her. So she confronts Dianne about her behavior. But this sort of worsens the situation for her.

Well, my questioning only made the situation worse. In her office, she started raising her voice at me so loud, that other employees could hear everything that she was saying to me. I was too embarrassed to ask her anything else

Karen now has to conform to the norms set by her supervisor. She is required to behave in the manner required by Dianne. She has to conform to the office decorum and code of behavior determined by Dianne. When she does it, she is faced with a completely new supervisor.

She would go out of her way to speak to me! . . . she would morph into a totally different person

Karen had changed as an employee. She was scared of her supervisor. She started “second guess[ing] the smallest items before I turned my assignment into her”

The control, which was oppressive, hurtful, and autocratic, had transformed Karen into a quiet, docile, and eager to please employee. The control, even though humiliating and insulting, was totalitarian in nature. The employee was indoctrinated into an obedient, polite, and willing to serve the needs of the supervisor without questioning her personality, actions, and efficiency. It also created a work environment, in which the manager emerged supreme authority, with no one questioning his or her orders and commands.

In other words, workplace bullying can be conceptualized as a control mechanism. It also matches the historical image of owner manager who can behave in any manner with his or her bonded labor with no questions asked. Despite the control measure effectiveness, bullying can have long-lasting aftermath because it is so personal and painful, hitting one at all levels—work, personality, and social life—and makes the victim introspect and reflect endlessly.

Karen got really worried about herself and her work. She got extremely stressed, “. . . my hair started to fall out and I lost a large amount of weight from all the stress”

This control measure can turn out to be devastating for the person being controlled and manipulated. The victim ends up becoming a “dysfunctional” and “robotic.” To summarize, it cannot be denied that workplace bullying can be a powerful control weapon to sustain the capitalist regime of power, terror, and exploitation. It might yield the results needed in the short run for the manager or supervisor. But in the long run, it could lead to disastrous and expensive outcomes for the employee, manager, and the organization. Therefore, workplace bullying needs to be condemned. The managers’ easy accessibility in using it as a control mechanism needs to be legally remedied, and strong actions should be taken at the organizational levels to protect the targets and the dignity of the workplace.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article makes a contribution by empirically supporting the theoretical assertions of labor process and industrial relations theorists of workplace bullying being a possible control measure. A single ethnographic case study from the health care sector is used to understand the implications of workplace bullying to control employees. Data are captured in a self-ethnographic narrative format by the victim. The data are critically analyzed to allow ethical justification if any in using this control measure in organizations. Empirical data supported the argument that workplace bullying is an autocratic control measure, which allows manager to maintain his or her authority over his or her employees successfully. However, if it is allowed to escalate beyond a certain level, it

leads to stress, depression, and employee turnover. In other words, workplace bullying has all the elements of a powerful control weapon that managers could use to control and manipulate his or her employees with serious long-term detrimental effects.

Furthermore, labor process theory as a theoretical framework has tremendous potential in unlocking and exploring workplace bullying from a variety of fresh angles. The reasons behind the existence of workplace bullying, its continuous usage despite possible harmful aftermath, and its quiet encouragement from top management can be etched out. Light can also be shed on why, how, and to what extent, and in what circumstances management and employers might actually gain by practicing workplace bullying in their organizations.

Further unlike other perspectives which provided insights on the personality characteristics of the bully and the victim and consequences of bullying in the form of health issues, lower levels of work productivity, employee turnover and decrease in job satisfaction and morale. This theoretical framework allows insights into the reasons for its quiet acceptance in all office environments. It also explains the lack of anti-bullying policies within the system (with the exception of the proposed Healthy Workplace Bill, which is also inadequate, Carbo, 2009). Bullying is a harsh managerial style of the supervisor, an integral part of his or her management technique, used by him or her to get work effectively done by the employees. All the various belittling techniques, maneuvers, and humiliations make more sense. It is not personality or psychological disorders rather a feature of the employment system where the manager always has to remain in authority and control.

Labor process perspective allows deconstruction of workplace bullying further and raises serious concerns about employees' rights within organizations. It reveals that workplace bullying can be legitimized by the management, if so with serious consequences for the employees who would be manipulated to become docile, submissive clones eager to please the management and conform to their rules and requirements. It builds an argument that managers consider bullying to be their right, something they are allowed to do as part of their jobs, an autocratic way of managing their juniors. To demolish this perception, to revoke employees' fatalistic acceptance of workplace bullying and to avoid placing the rights and dignity of the employees in jeopardy it is essential to question this right of managers' to bully their employees. This study emphatically demands the need for company policies that penalize employers who allow bullying of lower paid employees. Better organizational rules, regulations, and policies that protect employees from bullying and safeguard their interests are required. This study strongly advocates for more organizational and legal remedies to protect employees and design safer and stress-free workplaces. "Work shouldn't hurt" (Namie & Namie, 2003 as cited in Carbo, 2009, p. 97) and neither should workers be stripped of their human dignity and be denied justice.

This study thus raises issues pertaining to ethics and workplace rights of employees. What should employees do to safeguard their interests and protect themselves from bullying? Can they demand anti-bullying policies in the companies they work? If these policies are existing, how can they make sure these policies get implemented? Employees need to collectively organize themselves to create more respect oriented office environments. First, employees need to generate more awareness about workplace bullying, differences between management style and bullying, what can be considered unacceptable or inhumane, and what could be classified as bullying via the latest social media tools like blogs, vlogs, Facebook, and Twitter. Simultaneously, support could also be provided to the bullied victims. Social isolation and exclusion could further worsen victims' mental health and balance. Internet help sites should be created that allow victims to post their stories anonymously and seek support and assistance to combat their stress, depression, and feelings of low self-esteem. These websites would also enable gathering evidence against workplace bullying and in seeking legal protection for employees from these dehumanizing managerial acts. Social media could be used to openly advocate for legislative measures, anti-bullying policies, and their implementation by the management. Future research could, thus, look at the role of social media and how it could be effectively used as a means to minimize workplace bullying (Namie, 2013).

Development of extensive literature on bullying as a control technique, its humiliating aspects, and its effectiveness in stripping humans of their inner self-confidence and respect would garner "positive voices" for trade unions and workers' cooperatives in their fight against workplace bullying. Trade unions should include workplace bullying as an issue of concern on their bargaining agenda. This would force management to consider bullying a serious issue like compensation and safety measures. Trade union representatives should demand that management clearly specify anti-bullying rules and regulations in their employee manuals. Future research could investigate the role of trade unions in legitimizing workplace bullying as an issue demanding the attention of management and employment tribunals.

Topics like office behavior, appropriate codes of conduct, and professional etiquette should be examined within management literature. Office behavior, office culture, respectful attitude, and congeniality need to be elucidated and investigated. Theories and models that explain working behaviors and cultures need to be further examined to erase workplace bullying from the corporate picture.

Research that records bullying cases and incidents from a labor process perspective would help in generating resistance against workplace bullying and the atrocities it commits. Revelations of human cruelty, abuse, and mental injuries would be brought to light and justice. This would aid and pave the way for anti-bullying legislative acts that would protect the workers and their human rights. Labor process theory by portraying workplace bullying as a control weapon

of management strongly advocates for anti-bullying legislations. Bullying laws which are able to legally safeguard the interests of employees instead of just leaving them at the mercy of the corporate management. In other words, adopting a labor process perspective when investigating workplace bullying would allow cleansing working environments of workplace bullying. It would lead to happier and more productive working climates.

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